

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 006447

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PTER KPAL EG IS IZ

SUBJECT: CODEL HOEKSTRA'S MEETING WITH EGYPTIAN GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SERVICE DIRECTOR SOLIMAN

Classified by Charge Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

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Summary

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¶1. (C) In an August 20 meeting at the Egyptian General Intelligence Service (EGIS), Congressman Hoekstra, Congresswoman Wilson, Congressman Shadegg, and Charge discussed Gaza withdrawal, terrorism in the Sinai, Iraq, and Iran. On Gaza, Soliman stressed the need to prevent Gaza from becoming a prison. On Iraq, Soliman urged the U.S. to focus on quelling violence and improving the lives of Iraqis rather than rushing to hold elections. Finally, Soliman urged the USG to engage with Iran. End summary.

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CODEL Hoekstra's meeting at EGIS

¶2. (C) Peter Hoekstra (R-MI), Chairman of the HPSCI, accompanied by Heather Wilson (R-NM), John Shadegg (R-AZ), HPSCI staff members Michael Meermans, Chris Donesa, Michael Ennis, and Jamal Ware met EGIS Director Soliman at EGIS Headquarters in Cairo on August 21 for over 90 minutes. The CODEL was accompanied by CDA Jones, ORA Deputy Graiss and poloff as Embassy notetaker.

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Gaza Withdrawal

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¶3. (C) Soliman said that Gaza withdrawal presents both challenges and opportunities for the region. Withdrawal is significant, Soliman noted, because it is the first time the GOI unilaterally decided to withdraw from the occupied territories, because it will give hope to Palestinians, and because it could potentially minimize the capabilities and popular appeal of radical Palestinian organizations. He added that because Egyptians are agitated by the ongoing deaths of Palestinians, ensuring a peaceful withdrawal is also important to Egypt's internal security. To that end, Soliman advised that the GOE will continue to support the Palestinians after withdrawal by training their security services and maintaining an Egyptian presence with new Palestinian battalions in Gaza to diffuse tension among factions.

¶4. (C) As for the future, Soliman warned that Gaza must not become a prison. Gazans should have access to sea/air ports, efficient land border crossings, and links with the West Bank for work, trade, and study. Without this openness, Gaza will not be attractive for investment and may become a "Gazastan" rather than the "Gazapore" the GOE wants it to become. Soliman said that when he shared this objective with PM Sharon in a recent meeting, Sharon responded that he plans to design a fast train link between Gaza and the West Bank. The potential for further Israeli withdrawal, from the Philadelphia strip in particular, will depend on making the GOI feel secure. Soliman said that the GOE aims to build this sense of security by using professional border guards (and not police officers) to secure the border and stop the smuggling through border tunnels. Congressman Hoekstra thanked Soliman for the positive role the GOE and EGIS is playing in Gaza.

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Sinai Terrorist Incidents

¶5. (C) Linking the Palestinian situation to the terrorist incidents in Sinai in October 2004 and July 2005, Soliman expressed optimism that withdrawal would weaken the "small" Jihadi groups based in Sinai that support Palestinian extremists. Soliman said that these groups easily recruited locals sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, and directed their terrorist acts against Israeli tourists because they found it difficult to cross into Israel. According to Soliman, the GOE arrested many, but not all, of the Jihadis and local sympathizers following the October 2004 attacks in Taba. He speculated that those not arrested launched the July 23 bombings in Sharm el Sheikh to avenge the arrested. Soliman shared that the GOE has a plan to "rid Sinai" of the remaining Jihadis, and noted that a more positive outlook

among Palestinians following a smooth Gaza withdrawal, will help in this plan by reducing Jihadi appeal among Sinai locals.

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Iraq  
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16. (C) The priorities for Iraq, Soliman explained, should include keeping it united, stopping terrorism, and improving the lives of Iraqis. Regarding the need for a united Iraq, Soliman expressed concern that the Kurds may be hoping to gain "privileges" from the new constitution and flagged the division that granting such privileges would cause among the factions.

17. (C) Soliman stressed that ending the violence should take precedence over the USG's political goal of finalizing a constitution and pressing for speedy elections. He offered two suggestions on how to stop terrorism. First, he urged the USG to consider (and offered to assist with) opening a back channel to Sunni insurgents, who he alleged are the well-trained ex-soldiers responsible for approximately 70 percent of the violence. Although he denied knowing the insurgents' demands, Soliman said they may want the release of prisoners or a delay in the constitutional drafting process. If the requests raised by the Sunnis are unreasonable, the U.S. can simply reject them, Soliman said. On the other hand, he argued, the dialogue may lead to an understanding between the Coalition and the Sunnis that would convince the Sunnis to stop their violence. Soliman clarified that he had raised, and the U.S. had rejected, the back channel proposal on numerous occasions in the past.

18. (C) A second approach to stopping the violence, Soliman argued, would require the Coalition to control Iraq's borders, which he described as a "disaster." He offered that any arrested foreign terror suspect will admit that that he entered Iraq through its open borders. If, however, the Jihadis from Saudi, Kuwait, and Syria see that it is hard to cross, they will stop trying, Soliman argued. Soliman predicted that until the Coalition breaks the cycle of violence, the Iraqi people will not focus on the constitution or elections and will blame the Coalition, not the insurgents for the violence.

19. (C) Bolstering development programs to improve the lives of Iraqis, Soliman pressed, must be a priority because it is critical to improving the Coalition's image and to creating an environment in which Iraqis can think about their future and their government and not just their security. He suggested that water, electricity, and road projects should proceed immediately in peaceful areas such as Basra to show the Iraqis that their lives are better and to encourage them to support the Coalition.

10. (C) Congressman Hoekstra, Congressman Shadegg, and Congresswoman Wilson all pressed Soliman to use his influence to persuade the Sunnis to participate in the constitutional drafting process and elections. So doing, Wilson noted, will promote stability and quell the violence. Regarding the need for development projects, Congressman Shadegg agreed that it would be impossible to "win" without first improving the lives of Iraqis. In response to the request for further GOE support, Soliman said "not now," citing the need to stop the violence before engaging further. He also declined to commit to encouraging Sunni participation in the government under present circumstances, explaining that the Iraqi people are not interested in the political process because they are not yet secure.

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Iran  
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11. (C) In response to Congresswoman Wilson's request that Soliman share his thoughts on Iran, Soliman stressed that he has always advised the USG to "dance with" Iran. Forcing Iran into a corner, he cautioned, will harm the entire region because Iran will react by becoming more radical. Soliman explained that engagement, by contrast, may allow Iran to make a deal that would let it escape from its currently bad situation. He added that a dialogue with a known source of terrorism and funding for terrorists would also be useful.

12. (U) The Codel did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.

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JONES